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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR DRL/AE DAN NADEL, EUR/CE JAMIE LAMORE

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SUBJECT: BLOOD, SWEAT, BUT NO TEARS: EMBASSY BUDAPEST
COMMEMORATES INTERNATIONAL ROMA DAY

REF: STATE 20359

¶11. (U) Summary: Embassy Budapest rolled-up its sleeves and came out in force in support of the 2009 International Roma Day (IRD). Officers and local staff participated in three events around Hungary to mark the occasion and pay tribute to the important contributions of the Hungarian Roma community. Simultaneously, public debate continued on the Civil Rights Ombudsman's inflammatory remarks about "gypsy crime" (para 7). End Summary.

¶12. (U) Eleven American and Hungarian Embassy employees, including ChargeQ Levine, participated in a blood drive sponsored by the Budapest Gypsy Self-Government and the Hungarian Red Cross. The event aimed to promote cooperation, social responsibility, and helping others. Details of the event were featured in both print and television media. The Embassy officials were joined by several local dignitaries and celebrities, including the National Chief of Police, politicians, and television stars.

¶13. (U) In a separate high-profile event on the following day, the National Chief of Police publicly thanked the Embassy for its overwhelming turnout at the blood drive and its strong support for the Roma community, graciously exaggerating that "everyone in the Embassy gave blood."

¶14. (U) At a separate event, the Cultural Affairs Officer (CAO) and local PA staff marked the occasion by visiting the small, predominantly Roma, village of Batoyterenye in northern Hungary. There they visited with teachers and students at a local after-school program for disadvantaged Roma youth where they joined the school's IRD celebrations. The CAO learned Roma songs and dances from the teachers and students in celebration of Roma culture. Following the program, the CAO met with the teachers to discuss the challenges facing Roma in the village and nationwide. The program was covered by the national media service, MTI.

¶15. (U) On April 9, the Embassy Legal AttachQ (LEGATT) and other EmbOffs participated in an IRD event hosted by the Hungarian National Police and the Fraternal Association of European Roma Law Enforcement Officers. The event combined a photo exhibition featuring images of Roma families with a ceremony to highlight the importance of diversity in law enforcement. LEGATT delivered remarks on the FBI's experience with diversity and the lessons it has learned about how different racial and cultural backgrounds among its staff enables it to more effectively serve and protect a diverse society. Approximately 100 people attended the event including law enforcement officials, members of the Roma community, government representatives, and the media.

¶16. (U) Brief articles and corresponding photos of our IRD activities are available on the Embassy's website. A link to the Secretary's video message is also prominently featured on the home page.

¶7. (U) The Embassy's IRD activities and other events around Hungary marking the occasion came in the wake of controversial public comments made by Parliament's Civil Rights Ombudsman Mate Szabo. In an interview with an online news agency on April 2, Szabo said he could see the "profile of a Gypsy crime" and described Roma as "an almost tribal group as opposed to the highly individual nature of Hungarian society." Szabo continued, saying, "When we see this profile, we must warn the people and we must give it a name."

Szabo's comments were summarily rebuked by several prominent government officials and NGO representatives, many of whom have called for his resignation. On April 3, Szabo publicly withdrew his comments and said it was not his intention to offend anyone. President Solyom summoned Szabo to his office on April 8 to express his displeasure with Szabo's comments, saying that his remarks may undermine the public's confidence in his ability to serve. If Szabo does not resign, it would take a two-thirds majority of MPs in Parliament to remove him from office.

¶8. (U) The Embassy's IRD activities were part of a broader public outreach effort to support the Roma community. Recent events have included an extensive school outreach campaign reaching over 1,200 students to promote tolerance, a tolerance YouTube video competition, presentations by Embassy-sponsored civil rights lecturers, a ceremony to honor the Embassy's International Women of Courage Award nominee of Roma origin, and the donation of over 50 pieces of office furnishings and equipment to a Budapest Roma media organization.

Levine